Sports Forum

Playing with Legends

Tennis Notebook
Jody Goldstein

She was ready to retire from life on the Tour but not ready to put down the racket, so the Virginia Slims Legends Tour debuted at the perfect time for Martina Navratilova.

The winningest player in women's tennis history makes her second senior stop in Houston May 17-18 when the Legends return to Westside Tennis Club.

"I don't miss it," Navratilova said about the daily rigors of the Tour. "And I don't think I will. I still play, so I still have the competition."

But it's a different sort of competition. If you come out expecting to see the competitors of old, you'll be disappointed. If you come out hoping to be entertained, you'll get plenty for your money, Navratilova said.

"I was always so serious when I played," she said. "People would always tell me I should smile more. I had this reputation for being stern and hard. But it's hard to look glamorous and relaxed when you're out there trying to win a match. Here, we laugh and crack jokes. I think I surprise a lot of people."

Because it's mostly a round-robin doubles format with little money and no ranking points on the line, the players can let their personalities come out more.

"In tennis, it seems like we're more scrutinized than any other sport," Navratilova said. "We wear no hats, helmets. We're just out there for people to see the sweating and the grunting. When people get to know me, they're always surprised at how soft I am."

But that doesn't mean there's no competition. All members of the Legends Tour achieved prominence in their primes. And though they clearly have slowed down and their strokes might not be as sharp as they once were, they don't want to get in front of a crowd and embarrass themselves with a shoddy performance.

"We smile when we compete, but we all still have pride," Navratilova said. "It's not Wimbledon and we realize that, but we all still want to win. When I was on the Tour, I wanted to win no matter what. Now, I'd rather have a good time than just win. I'd rather play well and entertain the crowd and lose than play ugly and win."

Houston's Zina Garrison Jackson also will join next weekend's Legends field.

Gullickson mourned – The tennis world mourned the death of **Tim Gullickson** last week. Gullickson, the twin of American Davis Cup captain **Tom Gullickson**, died of brain cancer May 3.

The Gullickson brothers won 10 doubles championships in their career as a team. Tim Gullickson won 16 doubles titles in all.

Most recently, Gullickson was known for guiding **Pete Sampras** to his No. 1 world ranking. He also coached such stars as **Martina Navratilova, Mary Jo Fernandez** and **Aaron Krickstein.**

"He taught me how to compete and how to win," Sampras said. "Even in his sickness, he was upbeat."

Gullickson's illness first caught the world's attention at the 1995 Australian Open when Sampras broke down in tears on the court. Gullickson only recently had been diagnosed at the time.

Pre-teen tournament – The Houston Racquet Club will host the 14th annual HTA Pre-Teen Tournament June 7-9. Deadline to enter is May 30. Events include boys and girls 9, 10 and 12 singles. Entries are limited to 65 participants. Players who have qualified for super-championship or championship 14s are not eligible to participate. For information, call 973-7636.

Kids program to return – It's never too early to introduce kids to tennis. That's the theory behind the USPTA's Little Tennis program for young children, making its return to Houston this summer.

Little Tennis offers activities, lessons, leagues and junior equipment for children between the ages of 3 and 10. To locate a program near you, call 97-USPTA or e-mail the USPTA at usptauspta.org

Jody Goldstein covers tennis for the Chronicle. Her notebook appears on Sundays. E-mail her at jgoldstein@chron.com

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